

Pam
Near East
Syria

Bolitho

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1877

The background of the entire page is a black and white photograph of a large, arched steel truss bridge. The bridge spans a deep valley filled with dense, leafy trees. In the distance, a body of water is visible under a cloudy sky. The bridge's structure is a complex lattice of steel beams and girders.

BRIDGING *the* DEEPS *In Syria*

Bridging the Deep in Syria

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A Bridge Is Such a Lovely Thing

A bridge is such a lovely thing.

*Where deeps impassable yawn wide,
Its graceful arches safely fling*

A path to join the other side.

It binds together alien shores

Spans wider rifts 'twixt creed and clan;

A bridge is such a lovely thing,

Meet symbol of God's reach for man.

—A. A. B.

INTRODUCTION

Bridges are works of God. Conceived by human minds and wrought by human skill, they still remain the symbols of God's good will to man. From the simplest bridge over a neighborhood creek to the majestic George Washington Bridge spanning the Hudson or the Peace Bridge joining two great nations, the purpose of them all is to unite peoples in good will and friendliness so whatever of wealth or wisdom each section may hold may enrich and ennoble all.

Other bridges, too, has God, and other deeps to span—chasms wide and deep, almost as impassable as that gulf which never can be crossed.

*Oh, east is east and west is west,
And never the twain shall meet,*

nowhere appears more true than in the ancient land of Syria. Itself a geographic bridge serving to mingle the peoples of three continents, the land has within its social life rifts deep and wide—chasms of religion, race, and politics, breaking up the unity of the land, setting brother's hand against brother and neighbor against neighbor; great canyons of doubt, of cynicism and despair, abysses of class hatreds, of ignorance, and of poverty.

How the gospel works to bridge these gaps and bring peace and good will to men who have not heretofore known its meaning is the subject of this sketch. We shall not attempt to write a history of Syria, nor yet to describe the customs of the country. Our purpose shall be served if we can show how a few of God's bridge-builders work to span the intellectual, religious

and spiritual abysses, joining opposing shores, and making over the chasms a pathway for our God to enter with his peace and brotherhood the distraught and unhappy life of the Syrian peoples.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This booklet is compiled from reports of missionaries, those engineers of the spirit, who have labored in Syria to span the abysses of ignorance, superstition, and prejudices which have made of this ancient land a shambles through the centuries. Especially is the writer indebted to Dr. John D. Crose for his vivid reminiscences of work among the students, the villages, and of his personal experiences; to Rev. Ibrahim Chemayel for the story of his own life and of the Maronite village work; and to Mr. Lester A. Crose for reading the manuscript and making suggestions and corrections.



RUINS OF OLD ROMAN BRIDGE ON ROAD FROM JERUSALEM
TO ANTIOCH

Bridging the Deeps in Syria

Chapter I

THE BRIDGE OF THE LAND

If one should put the point of a compass on Beirut, in Syria, and with Rome, in Italy, as the other end of the radius, draw a circle, it would be seen that Syria and Palestine lie like a bridge connecting three continents, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Over this bridge in ancient days tramped the migrating hordes of Hittite peoples entering Canaan from the north and east. Here also came the Hebrews from the valley of the Euphrates, where, it may be, civilization began. Across this bridge Hyksos struggled with Egyptian, Egyptian with Assyrian and Babylonian again and again. In later times the Persians and the Greeks passed here, and later yet the Roman and the Moslem hordes in their western sweep. Not far from Beirut, in the cliffs of the Dog River Canyon, are to be seen thirteen great inscriptions engraved there to the honor of the leaders of armies that have passed through. Here is Rameses II, of ancient Egypt, sacrificing to Re, the sun-god; here are the inscriptions of Sennacherib, Shalmaneser, Tiglath-pileser III; and Ashurnasirpal of Assyria; here the great Nebuchadnezzar, of Babylon, left his name and the recital of his deeds; as did Marcus Antonius, the Roman; Saladin, the Kurd; and centuries later Napoleon III, of France. In our own times British and French armies have passed this way in their endeavors to pacify the land.

But not alone as a bridge for marching armies and moving peoples is Syria important; it also served, and still serves, as a bridge for ideas. Consider the languages commonly spoken in the land: Arabic, French, Turkish, Armenian, Hebrew, Italian, English, German, and Greek. It is common for young men to speak from three to six languages fluently. Bible societies in Beirut carry their books in at least thirty-two languages. But language is merely the symbol for the ideas behind and creating it. What a ferment of ideas must be working in such a land, so tiny and yet so full; so insignificant in size, but so mighty in its influence upon the world! Ideas more explosive than gunpowder, more destructive than TNT, and others again that have blessed, and will continue to bless, mankind through millenniums. For in this tiny stretch of land from the Orontes River to the Dead Sea two mighty religions, Judaism and Christianity, rose; and a third, Islam, was largely shaped.

Christian missionaries understood the promise of a situation like this and early in the story of modern missions established here what has become the greatest university of the Near East. Students of thirty-four different nationalities have studied at once within her walls. Ethiopia, the Soudan, Egypt, Algeria, Arabia, Trans-Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Persia, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Greece, Bulgaria, and the Balkans send their sons and daughters to this American University. Here they enter the schools of nursing, dentistry, liberal arts, medicine, or science to prepare themselves for places in this modern world, so unlike the world of their fathers. From this great center of learning students scatter to take up work where they can find it, and to find fields of service in their homes or perhaps in some land quite foreign to them.

Divisions of the Land

Syria is not one state, but several. Due to the effort to give the peoples of that land as much "self-determination" as possible, the already small country is divided into tiny fragments, Lebanon, Alouite, Syria, all under the French mandate. Lebanon includes the coastal territory along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and the Lebanon Mountains, from Palestine to north of Tripoli. Alouite continues north along the seacoast to the Turkish border. Syria includes Damascus, Aleppo, and the territory south to the Palestine border.

Not only is the land divided into various states, but it is even more definitely divided among groups, racial and religious. For here dwell together, but not in peace, the Arab and the Jew, the Armenian, and the Moslem, the Druse, the Greek Orthodox, the Maronite Catholic, Roman, Greek and Gregorian Catholic, and the Alouite, with a sprinkling of evangelical Christians.

Seventy-five per cent of the three million inhabitants of Syria and Lebanon are of Arabic stock and of Islamic traditions, though the modern Syrian is really of mixed race. Each ruling group from the days when the Canaanite was in the land to the present has left on this little nation the mark of race, and so there flows in the modern Syrian's veins the blood of many peoples. The ancient Hittites, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Turks, Armenians, and even Europeans who settled in the land in the days of the Crusades, all have combined to make the Syrian what he is. Each religious and national group tried to preserve its own language, customs, and traditions; but the passage of time has mingled them and today, encouraged by the influx of western ideas and the spread of education, intermarriage is increasing.

This intermingling, however, has not progressed so far as to break down class and religious barriers, and the privileges of citizenship being granted on the basis of religious affiliation. Some minority or other is always feeling itself abused and staging a rebellion.

Nationalism, too, is growing in the country, making it increasingly difficult for the French government to maintain the mandate which it received from the League of Nations after the World War. But all uprisings against the government have until the present been futile by reason of the hatreds between the various religious and racial groups. In the uprisings of the Druses and Moslems in 1928, for instance, the sympathies of many Christian groups were for a time with the nationalists. But when the rebels, having gained



MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF OUR MISSION STATIONS

some victories, began to plunder the Christian villages and massacre the inhabitants, Christian sentiment soon changed.

The Land We Know

To Bible lovers the names of places awaken familiar echoes of the past. There is the range of Lebanon with its great cedars, made old friends by the writer of the Psalms. "The righteous . . . shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon" (Ps. 92:12), and by the part they played in the building of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Majestic Mount Hermon, somewhere on whose lower reaches Jesus was transfigured, guards the land on the south and east. Here is Damascus (most ancient of cities), the home of Naaman, the Syrian captain, who found deliverance from his leprosy in the waters of muddy Jordan at the command of Elisha. In Damascus also lived Ananias, who visited the repentant Saul after his humbling experience on the road just beyond the city, and prayed for him that he might receive the Holy Spirit. Were you to visit the city today you would be shown the place where Paul escaped over the wall, being let down in a basket by the brethren that he might flee the persecutions now turned upon himself.

Here is Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians; and Baalbek with her mighty ruins, the ancient center of Baal worship; here are Tyre and Sidon, near which the widow kept Elijah alive through the famine with her handful of meal and cruse of oil; and where the woman followed Jesus, crying aloud for the healing of her daughter.

Divisions among the People

Syria is a tiny land of only three million people—there should be unity of policy and purpose. But the people will not have it so, for, though they are mostly of a common racial stock, their various religions cut

across their social life like canyons isolating neighbor from neighbor. How deep and impassable are these chasms is seen by the fact that each religious group endeavors to live in villages of its own, carry on business and social activities only among its own fellow religionists, and often feels perfectly justified in robbing, and even killing, its fellow citizens of another faith. "God burn your religion!" is a curse phrase of especial venom.

Besides these abysses of religions, the people are set against each other by the accident of class. The rift between rich and poor remains impassable from the side of the laborer. There is no middle class as in America. Born into poverty, there is no hope or expectation of changing one's status. Manual labor is counted a disgrace while idleness is looked upon as honorable, provided only that the idler be well dressed. In times of stress and economic instability the upper classes move down the scale, while the poorer people sink into dreadful poverty and oppression. The lot of a servant is a hard one; low wages curse him and bitter cruelty is often his lot, so that a chattel slave may be better off than he.

Of slaves, both men and women, there are not a few. At the time of the massacres during and after the World War, thousands of Armenian women were captured and kept in Moslem harems. To the Moslem this did not seem a wrong, for multitudes of their own women lead lives little better than those of slaves in the harems of their husbands.

Ancient Customs

Customs hoary with age laid the weight of centuries upon the people. Among the worst of these is the custom of "Blood-feuds," which deplete the man power and keep the people separated by a wicked round of

hate and murder. If a man is killed, it is the duty of his relatives to kill someone; if not the murderer himself, then one of his family; if not one of his family, then one of his religion. Thus a vicious circle of crime is maintained which the government finds almost impossible to control.

Extravagant wedding and funeral ceremonies often lay a burden of debt upon the people from which they never recover. Among the Moslems the harem system still exists, with its attendant evils of polygamy and easy divorce. All that a Moslem husband need do to divorce his wife is to say to her three times, "I divorce you." For the woman there is then no recourse except to become a burden upon her family. We are glad to note that in Turkey these customs are being changed, and it is to be hoped that Syria may soon follow that example.



THOUSANDS OF MOSLEMS GATHERED FOR THEIR FEAST
OF BIRAM

Chapter II

THE CHASM OF RELIGION

Of all the chasms dividing the Syrian people, that of religion is widest and deepest. During the first few centuries after Pentecost all Syria became nominally Christian, and to tell of its influence on the spread of the gospel is almost to write the history of the church during the second and third Christian centuries. But with the insweep of the Moslem armies in the seventh century, all that was changed. There remain in the land remnants of the ancient churches, sick unto death, and so far without power to unite the peoples as to be themselves among the most disruptive elements in the body politic.

Besides these centuries-old Gregorian, Maronite, Greek, and Roman churches, the land must struggle with other cantankerous sects. The Alouite and the Druse, whose faith is a mixture of pagan superstition and Moslem doctrine; and Mohammedanism, the prevalent religion, claiming about 75 per cent of the inhabitants of the land. A sprinkling of evangelical Christians and of Jews adds to the confusion, for each of these religions has the significance of a political party. By a rite administered immediately following birth each child is inducted into his father's religion, and he is registered in the official records of the State as an adherent of that faith. It is inconceivable that any person should be without a religion, and to change one's faith is to be socially ostracized unless some groups move together.

We have no space here to review the history of the Moslem religion, but a glance at it seems necessary. Suffice it, then, to say that its founder, Mohammed, was born in Mecca, Arabia, about the year A.D. 570. When about forty years of age, Mohammed began to proclaim himself a prophet chosen of God to restore the ancient religion of Abraham. This brought upon him the scorn of the worshipers of the idol temple in Mecca; and in 622, with a few followers, Mohammed slipped away from Mecca and fled to Medina, two hundred and fifty miles away. There he soon became the civil ruler of the place, and in a remarkably short time he had welded almost the whole of Arabia into a common brotherhood. Idol worship vanished and the worship of the one God—Allah, in Arabic—became all but universal in the peninsula.

The revelations which Mohammed claimed to have received from heaven were soon written down. This book is called the *Koran*, and is the ultimate authority for Islamic doctrine and practice. The essential duties of a Mohammedan are five in number:

1. To proclaim: There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.
2. To observe the five stated daily prayer periods
3. To fast in the month of Ramadan
4. To give alms
5. To make pilgrimage to Mecca

A sixth one, which concedes the righteousness of Holy Wars against unbelievers, is not included in their "Five Pillars of the Faith."

There are also five essential doctrines:

1. The doctrine of God and of predestination
2. The doctrine of angels (a remnant of heathenism)
3. The doctrine of books
4. The doctrine of prophets—these include Adam,

Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and, most important of all, Mohammed.

5. The doctrine of the resurrection and of the judgment day

Animosities there always were, of course, from the time the Moslem took over the "Holy Land"; but it remained for the Crusades to arouse such hatreds as time has not been able to heal. Much good came from the Crusades, no doubt; such, for instance, as bringing the semisavages of Europe into contact with the higher civilization of Arabia; giving the common people of Europe an opportunity to see that they had much more in common with each other than with their lords who held them in feudal servitude. They awakened a new spirit in Europe, and when they were finished Europe was a very different place from what it had been at their beginning. In the East, also, they brought about changes, but quite the opposite from their intentions.

When the Moslems conquered Palestine and Syria in the first half of the seventh century they did not drive the Christians out of the country, contenting themselves with imposing a tax. Pilgrimages were permitted, and there was considerable friendliness between Moslem and Christian until, with the coming of the fanatical Turks, persecution and oppressions broke out. The Crusades were organized to seize the Holy City from the Turks. The effort, continued over two hundred years, not only failed to retain the Holy Land but engendered such insane hate as to this day makes the name of Jesus (recognized in his own sacred book as a prophet) poison in the mind of the Moslem.

The strength of Islam is its reverence for God, its emphasis on the doctrine of only one God, the Creator of men and of all things; the ultimate and only Will. Its great weakness lies in its certainty that God cannot be known and that his will is inscrutable. All human

wills can do is to submit without question. This philosophy crushes initiative and encourages indolence. Everything is as Allah wills; why then try to change? Perhaps the effort to change is really to oppose the will of God.

Aside from the hatreds engendered by war, the greatest stumbling block in the way of Moslem-Christian understanding is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. What, gentle reader, would you say to one who was utterly sure you were an idolater because you believe in "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"? And how would you tell what God is like to one who has no conception of love except in the sense of family love, and who is shocked to the extreme to hear you say, "God is love"?



MOHAMMEDAN MOSQUE

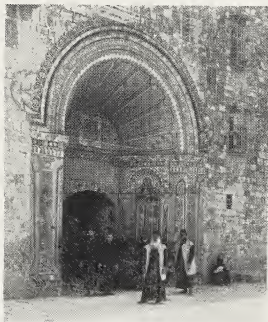
A Moslem Sheik Learns about the Trinity

One of the young men from our Beirut mission became involved in a religious conversation with three highly educated Moslem teachers—young men of

Beirut. Our young brother did not know what to do with them, so he finally said, "Well, I will take you to Mr. Crose. He will tell you." When the young men came they brought with them an old Moslem sheik. To continue the story in Mr. Crose's own words:

"I received them into our parlor with all Arab courtesies, but I saw that the old man was under tremendous tension and that he intended trouble. Naturally he resented any effort to convert the young Moslems.

"When we began our conversation the old sheik at



ARMENIAN CHURCH IN THE NEAR EAST

once asked if I believed that Jesus was God. I said: 'Now you have asked a controversial question and I shall have to make some explanation before I answer.' Then I asked him what the Moslems think of the doctrine of the Trinity. He made it plain that they think the Christians believe in three gods: Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, and that Mary was the mother of God and gave birth to a god here on the earth. They therefore think that we are pagans because we worship three gods. So the first thing I had to do was to tell the old sheik that the Moslem idea of the Christian's conception of God is incorrect. The young men chimed in, accusing us of being pagans because, as they said, we believe a man can be a god and that we offer worship to him. I saw that they were getting excited, so I passed the chocolates; and I was careful to keep a smile on my face, for the only thing an argument can do to a Moslem is to make him angry—and that is to lose your man and your argument as well, so far as they are concerned.

"When all had helped themselves to the candy and the atmosphere had cleared a bit, I began by saying: 'We Christians believe that God is Spirit—the supreme Creative Spirit of the universe. Mary could not have been the mother of God, for Mary was a human creature like ourselves. We do not know very much about spirits, but we do know that spirits exist.' To this they all agreed. Then I used the familiar illustration of electricity: 'Nobody knows what electricity really is, yet we use it to provide us with light, with heat, and with power. Likewise, we do not know how to explain God, yet we can have fellowship with him. We can feel comforted and strengthened by his presence, and have conscious communion with Him. As electricity flows through wires from the powerhouse and becomes in our lamps, light; in our dynamos, power; and in our

stoves and irons, heat; so the one God, who is too great for our small understandings, meets our needs in different ways. The source is the same; it is the one God always, but the medium used to make himself available to us determines the form in which the great God is comprehended by us and in which he meets our needs. We may not be able to explain, but God has become available to some of us, nonetheless; for we have learned how to put ourselves into contact with God even as we make contact between our electric stove and the powerhouse. Paul declared that Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh." When the fullness of time had come the invisible Spirit, God, found a way to make himself seen and known by becoming incarnate in the man Jesus of Nazareth. So Jesus became the light of the world. When we accept what Jesus told us of the love of God the Father, and submit ourselves to him, we discover the Holy Spirit of God within, and find that power is ours for service and for living.'

"Then I asked: 'What is religion for?' 'To help us in our human problems,' they answered. 'What is the supreme human problem?' Immediately they replied, 'Sin and suffering and the problem of what happens after death.' Then I said: 'If God is One, then he must be one for all mankind. Our needs are the same. If you are hungry and I am hungry, we feel the same kind of pain. And if we sin, whether Moslem or Christian, we suffer the same results. If Islam is good, it is good for all of us; and if Christianity is good, it is good for all.' Then I asked the old man frankly before the young men: 'What has Islam done for you?' 'What do you mean?' 'Has it helped you in your spiritual and moral life to be a better man?' It was a new idea! Again he asked: 'What do you mean?' 'Has it helped

you to stop lying?" The young men looked at me and winked. He turned his head on one side, looked at me, and then at the young men. I passed the chocolates, and when the old sheik had recovered his balance he



STRAIGHT STREET IN DAMASCUS

shot at me the best answer possible: "What has Jesus done for you?" That was the question for which I was hoping. "When I was a young fellow about sixteen I heard a minister preaching that a person who becomes a Christian must stop lying. I had just had a shoe repaired downtown. The cobbler wanted to know how the shoe came to be in such a state. I deliberately lied about the matter. When I heard the gospel I promised God I would make that lie right. When I explained to the shoeman, he said: "Oh, you didn't mean to lie." But I said: "That's the pity of it, I did." Since that day the grace of God has kept me from lying.' Immediately the young men exclaimed over it. This is the beauty of Christianity—real Christianity—it touches and warms the heart, cleanses the life, and gives power so that not only lying, but hate and the love of all evil are taken out of the life."

Chapter III

THE ABYSS OF IGNORANCE

Where no light shines there is little realization of darkness. Men born blind do not know what they have missed. A thousand villages in this ancient Holy Land wait the touch that shall awaken them to clean and wholesome living. A thousand years of ecclesiasticism and of Moslem rule have sunk the inhabitants into such depths of ignorance, superstition, and sin that their enlightenment must seem hopeless except to one who has seen the power and glory of God revealed in the opening of blinded eyes and blinder minds.

The villages are known as Druse, Moslem, Maronite, Alouite, Greek Orthodox, Greek or Roman Catholic, according to the religion of the people who live in them. Each group attempts to live in its own villages without intercourse of any sort with its neighbors of another faith. This, of course, leads to poverty and wretchedness and to endless quarrels and bloodshed.

These villages are not only morally backward; science has never touched them with cleanliness. The sanitary conditions are unspeakable. In some of them the infant mortality rate for the first year of life is as high as 70 per cent. One of the greatest needs is for a maternity clinic in each group of villages. Eye clinics also are desperately needed, and baby clinics as well. But almost without exception the doctors and nurses want to remain in the cities because of the extreme poverty of the villagers. Dr. Crose has this to say of the need of primary education throughout the Near East:

"If I could influence the educational policies of the Near East, I would ask that higher education be limited for a time and primary education speeded up. The gap between the masses and the few educated people is impassable. Doctors, lawyers, and nurses, if they return to their villages at all, go back with their diplomas in their hands, but unable to serve their people because the poor people do not know enough to avail themselves of their services. There these men sit with nothing to do, no contact with the ignorant rank and file, with no urge or means to uplift them, until they themselves rot morally."

Superstition grips the minds and souls of the villagers; even so-called Christians are terrified by the belief of the "evil eye." A blue-eyed foreigner should not look too long upon a baby lest he bring evil upon it, and there are all sorts of charms and incantations to



A SYRIAN VILLAGE

keep evil from attacking children, to cure diseases, and to safeguard life in general.

The curse of these villages lies heavily upon womanhood. To be a woman is to have no rights. Women are just property, not worthy of education or concern. The oldest son must be educated if at all possible, but the daughter is soon married into some other family; so why spend time and money on her?

Most of these villagers look with favor upon lying. They cannot see that falsehood is a sin or that it destroys character and personality. According to their philosophy it is perfectly right to lie under three circumstances: (1) in time of war, for God wills it (especially if it is in the cause of religion or country); (2) if you can benefit a friend (you will then be doing good, and doing good is virtuous); (3) if you are talking to a woman (for you must get along with her, and she cannot understand the reason for things). Sad to say, it is not only in the villages that this philosophy holds sway, as the following experience of Dr. Crose will illustrate.

"A Red Cross nurse, an American professor, and I were chosen to go to Damascus during the Druse rebellion to gather up some stranded people, children whose parents had been killed, some sick and wounded. At our first attempt we got as far as the summit of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range when a train just in front of us was blown up and looted by the rebels. The troops went on, and we were left to wait for five hours in the snow. Finally they pulled our train back into Beirut. The second time we went in an armored train and got through to Damascus. After two days, our work being done, we started to return. The professor left us on the way; the nurse and I continued to the foot of the Lebanon Mountains to a town called Zahle, where a lot of Armenian and Assyrian children

needed our attention. There we stopped to make arrangements to send them the necessary relief.

"On the train we had met a young Moslem, a graduate of the American University. We asked him if there would be any way to get across the Lebanon Mountains to Beirut that night, for we did not want to remain in that dirty village over night. He replied that there was no train out, but he thought he could make arrangements. The mountains were full of bandits and the French had thrown barbwire barricades across the highway, stopping all night traffic and in the daytime cars were permitted to go through only with convoys. Our young friend said he did not want to stay in the village either, and intended to go through someway. 'All right,' we said, 'we'll go across if we can. You make the arrangements.'

"When our work was done we met him and he said: 'All ready! Everything is fine.' Just then a big French car flying a French flag drew up. A guard stood at salute. We thought it was a bit out of our class, but did not ask any questions supposing our young friend must be of some importance in that village. So up the mountains we went, happy that we were to get home so easily. Shortly we came to a barbwire barricade. A soldier stepped out, saluted, and let us through. This was repeated several times before I heard our Moslem young man say to the saluting gendarmes, 'Consul General.' Then I protested: 'Look here, young fellow, what are you doing? What is this, anyhow?' He thought it a big joke. 'Oh, I just went down to the officer in charge and asked for transportation permits to get through to Beirut tonight. The officer said, "Impossible! no one can go through." "Oh," I said, "but it is the American Consul General and his wife and they have got to get through tonight."' 'But, my man,' I cried: 'don't you know you could get us into trouble

with such a falsehood? In the first place here are our passports. Suppose they examine them! And in the second place you have involved us both in your lie.' How he laughed! By that time we were at the top of the Lebanon Mountains and practically through the bandit area. 'Well,' he laughed, 'we're almost home now and safe. If you can help a friend by your lie, it's a virtue, isn't it?' He could speak English well, was a graduate of a great university, but he was still Moslem at heart. It takes more than a knowledge of western science and literature to make a man trustworthy and upright within."

Among the Maronites

The Maronites, a primitive people, fiercely fanatical, are a Catholic sect owing allegiance to their own patriarch instead of to the pope. Their villages form a bloc in northern Lebanon along the coast, a bloc which has been absolutely closed to any form of Protestant or evangelical Christianity for centuries. Our mission is the first evangelical Christian effort to penetrate that bloc and establish a station in modern times. How the old fanaticism is being broken down and a desire for the gospel and the freedom it brings is being created is illustrated by this story of Bible colportage.

Some sixteen years ago, Mr. Crose and a Mr. Arthur Neve, a British and Foreign Bible Society colporteur, were working a small village called Zaghorta just below the center of the Maronite district. Many were anxious to get the gospels, though most could not read. (When one who obviously does not know how to read asks for a gospel, the colporteur hands him one upside down and asks, "Can you read, brother?" "E-nom," he will answer, "Yes, of course." But the little gospel upside down in his hand gives him quite

away.) In this village so many gospels were disposed of that the priests became stirred and incited the villagers to a riot. "We were in a little eating house," says Mr. Crose in telling of it, "where we had ordered our eggs fried and were waiting for them. The first intimation of trouble was a terrible noise coming down the little village lane. The proprietor cried aloud: 'They are after you to kill you.' He ran to bar the door. Just as the door was giving way the Moslem gendarmes came running to beat off the priests and their followers. The chief came in and asked, 'Who are you people? What is all this about?' We told him, 'Mr. Neve here is a British Bible colporteur and I am Crose, an American.' 'The French must protect the British and the American,' said the chief; 'come with me.' So he marched us back to our room and set two Moslem guards over us for the night. (Moslems protecting Christian from Christian!) They closed our shutters and permitted us only a very small light. The priests in the meantime were gathering up all the gospels they could find and burning them in the street in front of the house where we were under guard. Our guards seemed inclined to go to sleep, so we slipped a Bible out to them and they read aloud to keep themselves awake.

Later, when the riot had ceased, a delegation of young men slipped up through the dark to the guards and asked to see the missionaries. The guards let in two English-speaking youths. They begged, 'Can't you do something for us? There is a large and growing party in this village that wants the gospel and freedom as you have in America. Can't you help us out?' The next morning the chief of the gendarmes escorted us down through the village to the spot where we wished to address the people and give our testimony. 'We will protect you now,' said the chief, 'but if you

stay here they will kill you, and we shall not be able to prevent it.'

"Having presented the chief with a Bible which he accepted with graciousness, we went out to our little English car to leave. The gendarmes left us and almost immediately a crowd gathered, but the young men had a group who opposed the mob. The gendarmes came again and dispersed the mob; we threw our things into the car (poor Mr. Neve broke his teapot—a tragedy for an Englishman) and we were off. Hearing someone call, we looked back and saw the two young men who had visited us the night before running after us. We stopped and they came up panting, their hands over their hearts. "They didn't get our Testaments," they said, 'and they never will unless they kill us.'

"From such experiences and much sowing of the seed of the Word, slowly the desire has grown in many of these villages for the real gospel. They are beginning to see that the evangelical gospel means freedom from priestcraft and superstition, and an opportunity for education. Opportunities are thus thrusting themselves upon us, but one of the high officials of the French government warned us: 'Go easy, man. We cannot offer you any protection against the patriarch of those villages. Your lives are worth nothing if you oppose him.' So for the present we must work slowly and quietly."

The Opening in Seb'il

Seb'il, a Maronite village in the district of Kisserwan, lies on the road from Tripoli to the great cedars of Lebanon. Almost a third of Kisserwan belongs to the Maronite church, the land being occupied by convents, schools, churches, and gardens. The remainder of the district is divided between chiefs upon whom

the common people are dependent, all in proper feudal style.

About the year 1932 the people of Seb'il became dissatisfied with their religious leadership, the reasons being the reputed misconduct of the priest in the village school and the fact that the village had been promised a road which was run instead along the property of the church, leaving the village without a highway. The people believed that the engineers had been bribed by the church officials. Wishing to be free from the rule of such leaders and desiring to revenge themselves upon the bishop and patriarch, a large body of these villagers asked the Moslems to take them over. This was because each village must have a religious setting and be counted in some religious group. When the Moslems refused for fear the French government



VILLAGE PEOPLE OF SEB'IL, FAVORABLE TO CHURCH OF GOD

would object, the villagers went to the Greek orthodox who also refused for political reasons. The Presbyterian mission was next asked. They, too, refused, perhaps because of the difficulty of the task, for the village was notorious for its crime.

After two years of fighting the priests and the government, which sided with the priests, during which time no school was held nor mass said, someone told them of the Church of God. Thereupon five hundred villagers signed a petition and sent three men with it to Dr. Crose. When the petition was shown to the government officials permission was given to send workers to the village. Mr. Maloof went first; later Mr. Crose, Mr. Chemayel, and others went. The villagers made a triumphal arch and received the missionaries as kinsmen. They did not know what the missionaries stood for, but they were delighted that someone had responded to their plea for help. All others had turned them down because they were such bad people. The response of our missionaries gave them an entrance into the hearts of the villagers.

The first obligation was to open a school, for now the mission was responsible in the eyes of the government for the well-being of the village. Mr. Chemayel opened a day school with sixty-two children, and night classes with eighteen young women and twenty-three young men. Much emphasis was placed upon singing. After study each evening the young people remained for singing and Bible study. The young teacher worked from eight in the morning until eleven each night, but testifies that he never was so happy in his life. The people were so eager to learn that teaching was no trouble at all.

But this great joy did not last long. There was too much enmity, jealousy, and fear in the situation. After

only twenty-one days the police came, ordering the school closed within twenty-four hours.

It was perfectly apparent what had happened. The church officials were displeased that the Maronite village should wish to become evangelical, and were taking this way to stop it. Dr. Crose took the villagers' petition to the High Commissioner and even to the League of Nations. There he gave an account of the suffering of the villagers and of their desire for freedom. Many officials in high places gave splendid aid in this endeavor, recognizing the rights of the minorities to religious freedom and to an education. Since the petition went through the League the outlook has been much better. It now appears that the Maronites may be able to change their legal status. This will involve changing their birth certificates from Maronites to evangelical Christians. If this happens, then our brethren will be permitted to marry, bury the dead, and inherit in the same legal way that other groups may do. As the situation has been, anyone who performs any of these services for the people is in danger of his life. Mr. Crose describes one funeral which he conducted. "One of our brethren died; the Maronite priest would not bury him; he had to be buried. I prayed every moment during that funeral. The young men sat with their guns across their knees; two guards stood watching us. The tension was terrible. I plead with them with all the power I had, urging upon them the necessity of peace, love, and brotherliness."

But in spite of all the handicaps and the obstacles placed in the way of a decadent churchianity, miracles have occurred. It is common knowledge that many of the villagers came to us just to have revenge upon the Maronite priests and bishops, but faith in the power of God enabled our brethren to see and to seize the opportunity. Now there is a group of young people in

Seb'il who are providing leadership for the younger folk, and the character of the entire village has been changed. The gendarmes had been arresting two or three every day for crimes of violence; now the arrests are infrequent. Where formerly there was cursing and vulgar talk, the singing of hymns is heard. Instead of vile epithets flung at each other, the villagers are calling one another, "brother," "sister." The making and drinking of wine has fallen off; grapes are turned into raisins instead. "What did you do to these people?" asked a government official of Dr. Crose. "How could you get such results with so little expenditure of funds?" The gospel is still the "power of God unto salvation to all them that believe."

Monkheiber, the Village Bully

Monkheiber, the son of one of the leaders who had asked the Church of God to come to the village of Seb'il, was twenty-three years old at the time and famous for his physical prowess. The people feared him, for he mixed in all the village fights and gloried in his strength. This young man came regularly to all the classes, learned to read, and enjoyed singing with the young people in the evenings and mingling with them during the social hour after classes. He showed a great deal of intelligence and began to read the Bible in his leisure time.

Village work demands the personal touch. Monkheiber came in for his share, and much to the surprise and delight of the worker, he asked for prayer. He seemed to meet God, for a tremendous change was apparent in his life. Drinking, smoking, cursing, and fighting dropped away. It was a marvel to see humility and kindness take their place. A delegation of young people came from the village to the revival in Beirut. Of them all, only Monkheiber dared to ignore the dif-

ference of dialect enough to stand and say: "Though my dialect is not the same as yours, I'm not ashamed to speak. Jesus has saved my soul. I love the Church of God."

No young man can follow Christ in Syria without severe testings. Monkheiber has had his full share, but stands loyally by the truth he knows. At the meetings when no missionary is present, this young man reads the Bible, conducts the singing, and sometimes exhorts. He may not lead in prayer, as only old men may pray in public.



MAR MITRE CHURCH OF GOD AND MISSION HOUSE, BEIRUT

Chapter IV

THE GULFS OF DOUBT AND LONELINESS

To the great American University come thousands of students from all over the Near East. These young people, far from home, in new surroundings, meeting with peoples of many tongues and differing religious outlook, need more than any other thing the steady hand of a friend who knows God and whose faith is sure. Dr. and Mrs. Crose from the beginning of their work in Beirut have kept open house for these lonely young people.

"My Rodgers is going out to Beirut to attend the American school. Will you look after him a bit? It will be a comfort to know that he may feel at home with your family." It is a missionary from far inland speaking to Dr. Crose. Open house for missionary children coming from all over the Near East to attend school in Beirut; entertaining the Christian Endeavor, providing them space for their meeting, looking after them, hearing their troubles, loving them, feeding them; how shall we measure the influence of gracious Mrs. Crose, missionary wife and mother, on scores of men and women scattered over the world who look back with grateful affection upon that humble mission home!

Not all who visit that home and study the Bible there become Christians, but none can go away after years of such friendship with the same feeling of animosity or of indifference toward Christ and toward Christians with which many come to the campus.

Out of the quiet and seclusion of a Persian village

came a young man to the coast to complete his education. Born a Moslem, he had been convinced of the truth of Christianity and had surrendered his life to Christ, but when he entered the university he heard teaching so different from that of the mission school in which he had been educated that he was shocked. In the mission home he groaned aloud, "I forsook my home," he cried; "I left my inheritance for Christ, and now they tell me Christ is not what I thought he was. Why did I give up my old religion?" His distress of mind was heartbreaking to see, but presently he was helped by discovering that not all Christians have lost faith in Christ as the Son of God, or in the Bible as the Word of God; that the upsetting theories are merely the ideas of certain who have lost their way while still professing to be Christian; that his own personal experience of Christ at the time of his conversion was more trustworthy than the speculations of those who have never known Christ, for "spiritual things are spiritually discerned."

The kindness and understanding of the Christian friends in the mission home and their concern for him finally drew him to believe again that God, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the God of love. Gradually his mind cleared and he was himself again. But to help these students through their periods of doubt is not always so easy. Many lose their faith never to regain it, and many replace it with some destructive philosophy that can heal neither the hurt of their own hearts nor yet that of their beloved country.

The youth of the Near East are in the throes of tremendous spiritual upheavals. Think of the Armenian young people, for instance. The children of a martyred nation, they have grown to young manhood and young womanhood with the most dreadful pictures on the walls of memory. Many of them saw their fathers

murdered, their mothers and sisters abused. The old, old question tears unceasingly at their hearts: "Why, O Lord, why? Why are brutish men allowed to prosper and to persecute to the death men better than themselves?"

*Vice oozes from their very soul,
their minds are rank and riotous,
their talk is mocking and malicious,
and haughtily they lay their plots;
lofty as heaven itself their speech,
lording it over the world below.
So people turn to follow them,
and see no wrong in them,
thinking, "What does God care?
How can the Almighty heed—when these
the godless, prosperously fare.*

—Ps. 73:7-11 (Moffatt)

So protested the Psalmist long ago. So today protests the Armenian youth, earnest about life, but sorely tempted to believe that God, if there is a God, is not concerned with the struggles of his creatures nor cares whether they live or die, or whether right or wrong is triumphant. There is more than a trend among such to look for relief—not to God and righteous living—but to some economic short cut as Bolshevism or to deaden the pain in their hearts by the opiate of atheistic cynicism. Others do cling to their early faith, trying to believe in spite of all they have seen and experienced that God is good and that good must triumph in the end. How shall we describe the abyss of despair that yawns before these suffering youth when they have the misfortune to attend the lectures of some professor, learned, but unwise, who feels it is his duty to emphasize the materialistic interpretation of life.

Dicran Khuntrouni

Such was the experience of Dicran Khuntrouni. The massacres left him an orphan. Some German friends in America saw him through the mission school and college. But in spite of the kindness of his friends, Khuntrouni could never still that questioning within: "Why, oh why, did God allow the Armenian people to suffer so horribly at the hands of the brutal Turks?" Clinging to the shreds of faith as a drowning man clings to a raft, Khuntrouni entered the university. There, unfortunately, he heard expounded theories that cast serious doubt upon the belief in a beneficent Presence in the universe to whom a man may turn in his extremity. Like a young animal driven to bay, Khuntrouni turned this way and that for some refuge or for some assurance that it is better to go on living than to destroy oneself. Fortunately, just at this crisis a friend brought him to the mission home. He was an intelligent young man, but philosophy could not help him. None of the faculty understood, or if they did



DICRAN KHUNTROUNI

they were not able to lead him to light and satisfaction. But the quiet home of the mission, the fellowship with those who obviously knew the God whom he had lost, their confidence and faith in him, and most important of all the emphasis upon the love of God and the greatness of His truth as revealed through Jesus Christ finally brought the young man again into vital touch with reality.

Though he had to work to put himself through the university, Khuntrouni received his degree with honors. As a sign of his absolute devotion he refused to study on Sunday, but used the entire day each week for serving others and in prayer and worship. He came out of the university with an extraordinary influence upon the student body. A Persian son of an emir expressed the feelings of the students when he said to a large group of Mohammedans, "I don't know what you think of Christianity, but there is one young man in the university who has something." Mr. Khuntrouni is now one of the Armenian evangelical workers in Beirut, leading in a fine, nonsectarian attitude the thinking of the Armenian Christians. He is not a rabid nationalist as most of the Armenian youth tend to be, but has the confidence of the Arabic-speaking young people as well. The evangelical missions all are glad for the service he is rendering. Of him, and another like him, one missionary said: "This is indeed an exceptional thing; your two best men are of that type, bridging with their Christian tolerance the gap between these two highly inflammable groups, the Moslem and the Armenian, who by all the experiences and traditions of the past would naturally be at each other's throats." Today Mr. Khuntrouni's influence is felt in all the Armenian youth movements in the Near East.

Aram Topus Khanian

He was traveling on a train from Aleppo to Beirut, having only lately returned from the front where he had been serving the Turks and Germans as interpreter in their campaign against Allenby in the World War. It was a matter for wonder how he had escaped death in the awful rout of the Turkish army, pinched as it was between the Arabs under Lawrence and the troops of Allenby pushing up from the south. He had

been very ill and was riding in an old-fashioned Victorian type buggy. Men were being killed all about him, cross fire picking them off right and left. How he escaped he never could tell.

After the collapse of the Turkish regime following this battle, he returned to his home. He was without employment, and unable to find any. Nor could he remain at home without working, for his father was dead and his mother a widow with three children to support. In desperation he did the very unusual thing of seeking manual work. In the eyes of his friends he would better have starved to death than lower himself and his family by working with his hands. But he went to the carbarns and asked the manager for work. "There is no use making application," he told him; "thousands are applying." "Well, I'm going to work anyway," he said. "Well, if you're going to work anyway, there are some old motors out there, get to work and dig the grease off them." A few days later the boss came around and said: "You should do something better than that; here is a different job." At this writing this young man holds a very responsible position in the Revenue Department of the Port Company of Beirut. But we are ahead of our story.

On the train that day from Aleppo, Aram was in the depth of despair. No work, no God, no reason for living! Across the aisle sat a young lady. Now young ladies in Syria are not supposed to speak to young men; certainly not to strange young men on trains. But some urge came upon Miss Arexia Salibian (now Mrs. Hartselle) and she handed Aram a Gospel Trumpet and invited him to visit the missionary family who had just arrived in Beirut. Let Dr. Crose tell what happened then: "He came, full of questions and hesitant to be anything more than just a little friendly. (Friendliness goes far with these youths, so hungry

for human understanding.) I took him with me in my work in the Armenian refugee camps and used him as an interpreter. Though he was a Gregorian Catholic and had never before come into contact with any evangelical faith, there seemed a bond that held him to me, and on my part I enjoyed having him with me. One day holding a meeting in the camp, right in the midst of the most terrible suffering of those early days after the war, I was making an appeal to a crowd of the most dejected and ragged looking refugees. I asked any who were interested to raise their hands. Aram was standing behind me and I did not see his hand go up. So he touched me on the shoulder and said: 'I want to, also.' There and then he surrendered his life to Christ, and found his feet no longer sinking in the mire of doubt and fear, but firmly placed upon the solid rock.



ANOTHER VIEW OF BEIRUT CHAPEL

Chapter V

BRIDGING THE GAPS FOR THE STUDENT

The youth rally fills an important place in our work in the Near East. All the young people interested in Christian experience are invited to come with their leaders. This invitation reaches the mission schools, and finds a ready response from the missionary teachers and heads of these schools. They are glad for such rallies to which they may bring their Christian students and others who may wish to learn the Christian doctrine.

The usual procedure includes two or three short addresses on Christian experience: what it is, how to obtain it, deeper victorious living, the meaning and power of faith, the value of the Scriptures, and such themes. There must be plenty of special singing and good testimonies by the young people themselves. A question-and-answer period helps to clarify problems regarding the authenticity of the Scriptures, the work of Christ, the nature of God, and other points of Christian doctrine. These rallies are especially needed because of the lack of doctrinal teaching in Christian schools whose faculties are limited regarding what they may say about Jesus Christ by the control the government exercises even over mission schools.

Another most useful experiment is the Bible Readers' Club, organized for the University students. A list of Bible references is given the students. These they keep in their Bibles, reading a certain portion each day and bringing their comments and questions to the Club.

The influences of these classes and rallies, and especially the influence of the mission home in Beirut, is being felt all over the Near East and even as far away as South America. For out of them have scattered far and wide young men and women who now occupy responsible positions.

There is Elias Saheuni, of Port Said, who gave his life to Christ in one of the mission meetings. He is now working under the Bible Society, their key man in Port Said and colporteur to ships passing through the Suez Canal. He is a wizard at languages as he needs



JOHN D. CROSE

to be, for through that waterway pass peoples of all races and tongues. The Bible Society appreciates his genuinely nonsectarian attitude, even as he loves the unity of the Spirit as expressed in the work of the Church of God in the Near East.

Another earnest spreader of the Word is Antonious Boudy who was converted when Mr. Riggle was serving in Syria. Mr. Boudy is now selling Bibles and preaching in the Alouite villages of the north, proclaiming the plain gospel without denominational bias. A most sacrificial spirit, this brother labors beyond his powers, sharing the horrid poverty of the villagers. When there is no money to pay for the gospels or Scripture portions, he accepts eggs or wheat or olives. Never is an earnest seeker turned away for lack of money, and when there is nothing else with which to pay Mr. Boudy himself, out of his meager funds, pays for the Scripture that not one who desires the Word may be denied.

Daniel Mardini attended the mission for years. He is now holding up the banner of Christ in the Bahrein Islands in the lower Persian Gulf.

Habeeb Khouri found the Lord in one of our meetings in Egypt years ago. He is now one of the oldest men in the employ of the Bible Society in Jerusalem.

Miss Rudda Jureidini found the Lord when Miss Laughlin and Mrs. Byrum were in Syria during the dark days of the World War. She is now a teacher in the American Girls' School in Beirut, and one of the strong leaders among the Arabic-speaking Lebanese.

One of the first girls to be converted when Miss Laughlin was teaching in Shweifaf was Isabella Melek. She is now a teacher in a Jewish school in Bagdad, where her influence points many towards our Lord Jesus and helps to bridge the gulf between Hebrew and Christian.

Dr. Crose tells of a visit to Bagdad: "I had no idea that there would be a place found to hold meetings immediately, but planned to visit some members of the Beirut congregation who were living in Bagdad. My first call was on the Y.M.C.A. secretary, a personal friend of mine and a definite Christian. Immediately he expressed a wish to have a meeting. To my surprise, by the time we had met our old friends and some of their friends, we had a house full. These were Iraqi and Syrian young men serving in various government positions, schoolteachers, and doctors. There was no



MRS. JOHN D. CROSE

difficulty getting them together. It was the simplest thing in the world. The Y.M.C.A. in Bagdad is a cross section of the world: Armenians, Persians, Indians, Arabs, Hebrews, Iraqians, Turks, they are all there; streams of racial and national life mingling here like rivulets having their sources far apart but uniting to form a river rushing to the sea. So they gathered in our meetings with their questions: 'How can religion be reconciled with science?' 'If the world is controlled by fixed law, how can we expect God to answer prayer?' 'Is life worth living? and if so, what is the ultimate meaning and purpose of it?'

"Nor were these idle questions, posed to make an argument. The questers were men of education and good positions. Life and death waited upon the answers. For the entire Near East is shot through and through with an utterly pessimistic viewpoint towards God and life. There is no limit to what might be done for such as these—and their name is legion—were there someone released to work just among the students of the Near East."

Thus in Egypt, in Persia, in Palestine and beyond Jordan, in Ethiopia and the Sudan, in Arabia and Turkey, in Iraq and in Syria, in Alouite, in Greece, and the Balkan States of Europe, and even in far-away South America there are living and working those who have found in our humble mission station in Beirut the forgiving and cleansing love of God, and—just as important for them—the stability and security that comes from knowing God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter VI

THE DEEPS OF THE SPIRIT

After the deportations Aleppo and Lebanon were overflowing with Armenian refugees. It took the combined labor of all the missionary bodies and the Near East Relief to keep the refugees from starving to death and to devise means towards their rehabilitation. In this vast effort the Armenian found themselves thrown together as they had never been before. Gregorians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians found themselves as one in their desperate need. They found something else also: that the people who bound up their wounds and poured in the wine and oil, while they went by many names—Danish Lutherans, Canadian and American Mennonites, United Missionary Society, Friends of Armenia from Great Britain, Swiss Protestants, and our own Church of God workers—all were one in their lovingkindness and in their endeavor to alleviate suffering. And more, their service was rendered in the one Name of the loving Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord and theirs.

In those months of unspeakable suffering there began among the Armenians—quite independent of the program of the missionaries—a very interesting movement towards deeper Christian experience. We found them eager, not only for conversion but for a definitely consecrated and sanctified life. Much emphasis was placed on prayer and faith for healing, and there was evidenced a sincere desire to find some visible expres-

sion of unity among the spiritually minded believers of whatever creed.

The idea of reformation began working among the Armenians about the year 1920. It developed steadily, becoming more and more indigenous, and, as the Armenians began to be absorbed by the economic life of the country, self-supporting. They have steadily refused to allow themselves to be taken over by any foreign mission board, though they are very friendly towards all the missionaries and are glad for any spiritual help the missions may be able to give them. In fact, wherever they feel safe from domination their eagerness for leadership is touching.

Out of this demand of the Armenians for spiritual guidance and unity, the missionaries started a monthly prayer meeting in which they planned to pool their interests and prayer needs. They came together not to preach to each other, but to pray and to strive to break down any barriers and eliminate any frictions that might have arisen between any of the groups or between individuals. From thirty to fifty workers gathered once each month to pray and to lay before each other the needs of their work. The effects have been more far-reaching than one could have dreamed possible. The Gregorian—that ancient and quiescent church, tracing its origins back to Saint Bartholomew and Saint Thaddeus, is beginning to feel the spirit of revival. All the mission bodies, too, are enlivened by this constant meeting together before the throne of God. No longer do the Swiss and Danish mission number their members by any formal ceremony, and testimonies of answers to prayer for healing have greatly increased. All the groups represented in this prayer circle are working together in beautiful harmony, and the Armenian group, whose birththroes drove the mis-

sionaries to their knees, is increasing in strength and spiritual power.

Here is a challenge which numerous missionary leaders would like to take up. But most mission boards are slow to put money where they do not have domination. There is, therefore, in this movement a tremendous opportunity for those who are more anxious to see the Kingdom of God increase than to increase the authority and numbers of any particular denomination. In both these movements the missionaries of the Church of God have had a large share of leadership.



MR. AND MRS. LESTER A. CROSE

Chapter VII

THE LAST ABYSS OF ALL

A dancing girl out of the Balkans came to Beirut and fell into bad company. Without a friend or anyone to say a comforting word, she lay in the agony of blood poisoning in the American University Hospital. The physician appealed to Dr. Crose to visit her. "Will you not please go to see her; she is dying." Once more the joy of telling the old, old story to one who had never known. And who shall say what use the Holy Spirit may have made of his own Word!

Into the same hospital came a big man of the Iraq Petroleum Company. He was a dreadful drunkard and a blasphemer. A nasty infection in his leg refused to heal, there being too much alcohol in his system. "I never knew anyone who could use so many curse words," said the doctor. But with his feet dipping into the waters of the last crossing, this big rough bully confessed in his remorse: "I've done wrong; I know I've done wrong." How happy for him that there was within reach a missionary of the cross to whom he could tell his sins and who could point him to Him who, though He knew no sin, became sin for us!

For thirty-five years Dr. Nesbit Chambers served our Lord in Turkey, standing by his people through all the horrible massacres. When he was very old and unable to travel his family came to America on furlough. In their absence the Crose family was invited to live in his house, direct the servants, and keep the aged saint company. Suffering and shaking with palsy,

the aged warrior of the cross came down to that stream which the Lord alone can bridge. "Croze," he said, "what is this feeling I have had in my heart ever since the day my Armenian pastor was killed in my arms?" Pursued by a Turk the pastor had fled to Dr. Chambers, rushed into his arms, and there the Turk had stabbed him to death. "The blood of that righteous man gushed out over me. I can see it yet! Since that day an awful feeling of horror flows through me every time I think of it. I am going soon and I don't want to have anything between my Lord and me." "But you do not hate that Turk nor anyone else, do you?" "No, of course, I don't. It must be my human feelings of indignation and horror at such terrible injustice." And so the old man passed over, comforted and strengthened for the last abyss of all.



ARMENIAN REFUGEE CAMP

Chapter VIII

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

A village school in Shweifaf, Syria; a call for a teacher of English; a response from Miss Bessie Hittle (now Mrs. R. R. Byrum), of Anderson, Indiana; in such simple and unassuming ways does God begin great things. It was in the year 1912 that Miss Hittle, accompanied by Mrs. G. P. Tasker, took up her duties in the village school. Very shortly the ladies recognized an opportunity for gospel work. In response to their plea Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Smith went that same year to Shweifaf. Mrs. Tasker soon went on to India and Miss Nellie S. Laughlin, of Barnet, Vermont, went out to take her place.

The mission was fortunate in its first converts: young women of refinement and intelligence who immediately added their endeavors to those of the missionaries and teachers.

In 1914 Mr. and Mrs. Smith returned to America. Miss Hittle and Miss Laughlin severed their connection with the school, the better to give their time to missionary activities. Then came the World War. Miss Hittle returned home at the call of the Board, but Miss Laughlin elected to remain by the work. The experiences of those years are not easy to imagine. All communication with America was severed. For more than a year no money could be sent to her and no word was received from her. The American Press very courteously loaned her money until she could again receive her allowance from the homeland. The church re-

mained loyally by her side, and when the war was over the little company had increased in numbers.

Realizing that the work should be in a more strategic center Miss Laughlin moved to Beirut in 1919, and there the numbers of believers increased more rapidly. Miss Adele Jureidini (now Mrs. Hajjar) and her sister,



NELLIE S. LAUGHLIN (now missionary in Egypt)

Miss Rudda Jureidini, both of whom were among the first converts in the school in Shweifat, now rendered invaluable service. Educated in English and Arabic, they served as interpreters, teachers, and translators. Mrs. Hajjar, especially, translated several books into Arabic, among them, *What the Bible Teaches*, by F. G. Smith. Miss Rudda served for many years as principal of the Sunday school in the Mar Mitre congregation in Beirut.

The little company was greatly encouraged when Mr. Smith and Mr. E. A. Reardon stopped to visit them in 1920 while on their world missionary tour. Twenty-one new converts were baptized during their visit; and Mr. Najeeb Berbari, who had found the Lord in the first years in Shweifat, reported the baptism of fourteen in the villages near Tripoli.

The work was again strengthened by the evangelistic visit of Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Riggle (1921-1923), who made openings in many villages where the evangelical gospel had never been preached. Two years later Mr. and Mrs. John D. Crose, formerly missionaries to Japan, went out to Syria. Lester, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Crose, felt a distinct call to give his life to the redemption of Syria and was accepted by the Missionary Board in 1933. Lester and Ruthe Crose spend their time laboring in the villages and among the youth of Beirut, joyfully carrying on that Syria truly may become a "holy land."

The Mar Mitre Church

In the Mar Mitre section of East Beirut is located an Arabic-speaking congregation composed mostly of Syrians. This church carries on a day school with an attendance of about one hundred and fifty children, under the able leadership of Nellie M. Majdalani, the principal. On Sunday about the same number of chil-

dren gather to receive Christian instruction. Ibrahim Chemayel is now the superintendent of this Sunday school, succeeding Miss Rudda Jureidini who was its able leader for years. Ibrahim Maloof, whose story appears in a later chapter, is the pastor of this church. Self-government and self-support are two goals toward which this congregation has been climbing. At length they seem to be almost within sight, much to the delight of the missionaries.

The building which this congregation occupies is of re-enforced concrete, two and one-half stories high.



ADELE (JUREIDINI) HAJJAR

The chapel seats three hundred people, and the school-rooms on the lower floor accommodate more than a hundred children. The local church paid one-third of the original cost of this beautiful building; the Woman's Missionary Society of New York state having made the project possible by providing the first two or three thousand dollars.

Rooted in Heart and Soil

No church can grow into robust health in any land unless the native soul is in it. Much prayer and toil have gone into the effort to make our Christians of Syria feel that the work is theirs and the Lord's. To this end every healthy sign of spiritual autonomy had been encouraged. We have been fortunate in the quality of our native workers, without whom, of course, nothing could have been done. Besides those who have already been mentioned in this sketch, it is impossible to appreciate too highly the work of many others.

Aessa Mussery, a Syrian, during his eleven years in America, was converted in the Church of God in Toledo, Ohio. After studying in the Anderson Bible School for three years, he returned to Syria and became a most valued assistant in the local work in Beirut. He was ordained in 1929, and now spends most of his time in personal work, though the depression years have forced him to find part-time employment.

No record of the beginnings of our work in Syria would be complete without mention of Najeeb Wakim Berbari. Born in Syria in 1879, he spent several years in Brazil and Mexico until in 1907 he went to El Paso, Texas, where he was saved in the Spanish Methodist Church. In 1910 Mr. Berbari came into touch with the Church of God through the labors of B. F. Elliott and D. W. Patterson. He returned to Syria in 1913 and pastored a church in Safita during the World War. In

1919 he began a work in the village of El Birbara and surrounding districts, and in and about Tripoli. Half of the people of his village died of starvation during the last part of the World War and after. All who could get away left, so that the work he established suffered greatly by the emigrations to Brazil and other places, but his labors have not been in vain.

This brother's life has been full of suffering. He hints at some of it in a letter written at Mr. Crose's request: "While I was in Krebs, Oklahoma, I was persecuted by the Syrians because of the truth. Mr. Badeen (whom Mr. Berbari later won to the Lord) and many others had several assemblies against me, but after six months Brother Badeen was converted and we went to McAlester, Oklahoma, to attend the camp meeting. There we met Brother Porter and asked him for baptism. . . . After I came back to Syria I learned that most of those who persecuted me had become members in the church, and I received letters of salutation from them.

"Here in Birbara I baptized eight persons. Five of them left to go to Brazil; the others are still here in Syria. Two other young men I baptized are now in South America."

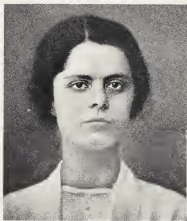
Mr. Berbari is now aged and infirm, grown old prematurely through the sacrifices he had to make in order to serve a desperately poor people, especially after support from America failed during the depression years. Will you, Christian friend, lift your heart to God in prayer for this brave man, your brother in Christ?

It is to multitudes of such brave spirits, working unknown and unsung in the farthest reaches of our world, that the cause of missions owes most. Men and women who have hazarded their lives, been forsaken and persecuted by their families and neighbors, the

first to be cut off when money is scarce, but faithful to the end. Their name is legion and their reward is sure.



SUNDAY SCHOOL, BEIRUT



NELLIE HASBANI

How to Stop a Blood Feud

The Story of Ibrahim Shaheda Maloof

We have spoken of the devastation wrought by the lust of vengeance. It is a human trait, and the best of us are slow to learn that it is better to make a friend of an enemy than to destroy him. How Ibrahim Maloof stopped a blood feud before it began is a tale full of the wisdom of divine love.

Mr. Maloof came from northern Syria, from the Alouite district. In his youth he attended an evangelical Christian boys' school and then took further studies in the American University. He taught in the Homs Arabic National College (an evangelical institution) for fourteen years. After that he served with the British army during the World War.

Our brother is a typical Arab, tall, loose limbed, sharp-eyed, prominent nose. He speaks excellent English, is a real Arabic scholar, and continues to read prodigiously. (The tendency in the Near East, even among educated people, is to cease to study when once the diploma is safely in hand.) He has every characteristic of the men of the desert, strong to command, alert and powerful of will. At one time he controlled a camp of a thousand men who were laying pipe line between Tripoli and Iraq.

In all these activities Ibrahim Maloof carried about with him a deep dissatisfaction. What a joy for this seeking young man to meet with the positive message of salvation and sanctification brought by our Dr. and Mrs. Riggle! The two men found something very akin in each other, and Mr. Maloof soon became Dr. Riggle's interpreter and right-hand man.

It was not long until Mr. Maloof was traveling from village to village in his native district preaching the gospel to those who had never heard the evangelical

message. Most educated men shun the villages, but Ibrahim Maloof loves his people. He is as much at home with a Bedouin among his sheep on the hillside, or with the Arab in his tent, or in the wretched huts of the village people, as he is among men of culture and education. For some years Mr. Maloof worked under the auspices of the Missionary Board. Then came the depression and our brother had to find means of self-support and see his beloved work neglected, for he had a large family dependent upon him. He is at present pastor of the Mar Mitre congregation in Beirut.

The character of the man is shown by a story of the days after his conversion when he was working as emigration agent, handling funds and arranging passage for emigrants going to South America. Envy that Maloof was earning a decent living while they could make no success at the same business moved three fellows to frame a charge against him that he was cheating the emigrants whom he served. The Consul investigated the charge and advised Maloof to put his accusers in prison. "Oh, poor fellows," he said, "let us forgive them. If we stir up hatred we shall have trouble all our life."

Not too long after that Mr. Maloof's little boy lay dying with typhoid fever. The doctors had given injections in the child's leg, these had become infected and the leg had burst open. The doctors gave him no hope. The child had been ill a month when one day our brother, looking out of the window, saw his chief accuser walking along. Mr. Maloof called out to him: "God has spoken to me. I must tell you that I have forgiven you for everything, and I made a vow that if God will heal my child I will give you a hundred dollars." (This to the wretched man seemed like a fortune.) Immediately the little boy began to amend, and

within a week he was well. Ibrahim Maloof kept his vow, paying the last cent. Of course, he won the heart of the wretched man—and who shall say by what measure he enlarged his own!

Persecuted, but Not Forsaken

The Story of Ibrahim Chemayel

Ibrahim Chemayel was born in Beirut, June 21, 1911, of a Greek Catholic father and a Maronite Catholic mother. There were two sisters. Ibrahim was educated in a Catholic primary and high school, sang in the church choir and assisted in the serving of the mass, chanting the epistles in Arabic. When graduated he taught in the Friar's school in Beirut where he was promised much advancement. But there was no satisfaction in his heart.

One night Chemayel and a friend, passing along the street, heard singing. Having nothing better to do, they entered the little church. Ibrahim laughed all



IBRAHIM S. MALOOF
Tripoli, Syria



ASA MUSSERY
Beirut, Syria

through that service. "This a church!" A man talking in English, a woman (of all things!) translating into Arabic! Ibrahim had lived all his life in the land which gave birth to the gospel, but now for the first time he heard the good news of salvation. Leaving the church he grew thoughtful: "There's something here. I'm coming again." For a whole year he missed only two meetings, and that from illness. He spent all his leisure time visiting the pastor and the missionaries.

His family became alarmed. They argued with him, and his mother wept day and night. But nothing could keep him from reading the books given him by the pastor. Twenty-three books he read, and twice did he read the New Testament through before making his decision. At length a priest seemed to prove to him that Protestantism is a disease and a heresy. An agony seized young Ibrahim. His struggles were terrific. His mother's cries, "My son, my only son!" awakened him each morning. He loved his mother, and knew that she adored him. It would have been easier to die than to go against her wishes. It was terrible to see her weeping all the day. But his inward doubt and uncertainty were more terrible still. He must know the truth.

One night a whole year after he first came to the church, Ibrahim found courage to go forward for prayer. Even then he did not find assurance, until one week later, when he rose and testified that he had given himself to God. Then came the peace that passeth understanding.

It was needed, for persecutions broke out in new fury. His sister watched to see if he went to the church. His father argued and blamed him. His mother wept unceasingly: "If you had become a Moslem (the deepest disgrace that can come to a Catholic in the Near East), I should not have grieved so deep." The

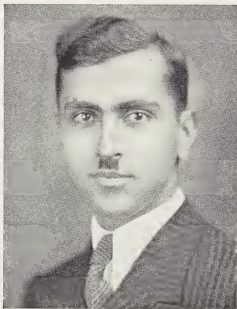
principal of the school where he taught came to advise him and offered him three hundred dollars if he would return to the Catholic fold (not being able to believe that the Church of God was not paying Ibrahim to become a convert). When the principal saw that nothing could make any difference, he said: "There are two ways; you must choose whether to renounce this foolishness or lose your position in the school." The next day Ibrahim was dismissed.

When his parents knew that he had lost his position, his mother told him that he must go from home. They could not have a heretic in their house, a member of their family. Without money, home, or work, this young man went out. But God drew near. His presence was precious real. Fifteen days later he found a position in a Moslem school. The principal knew that the Catholic people had put him out and said: "We know what the Bible teaches. If you are trying to live according to that teaching, we will open to you not only our schools and give you our children to educate, but we will open our hearts to you as well. We know what the gospel of Jesus is."

Later Mr. Chemayel became assistant secretary of the Y.M.C.A. in Beirut, and served there for three years. He did a commendable work among the "basket boys" who hang around the markets trying to earn a few cents by delivering goods for the merchants and their customers. These boys live on the streets and sleep anywhere. They naturally become criminals, stealing from all and sundry, and are a constant threat to the peace and safety of the citizens. One trick they play is to frame a quarrel in front of some shop. While the merchants are interested in the outcome of the fight others of the boys steal the wares exposed for sale. Ibrahim gathered these boys into classes,

teaching them to play and work together and instructing them in the things of Christ.

When the orphanages closed, throwing the Armenian youth who had been housed in them after the massacres out into the streets, Mr. Chemayel worked with



IBRAHIM CHEMAYEL

the young men and was able to help many of them to find work and to establish themselves. His work in Seb'il has already been referred to in the story of that village. Seeing the need of more education, better to assist the young people of his land, Mr. Chemayel attended the American University two years and then

spent one year in the Protestant Theological Seminary in Paris, where he made a deep impression on the faculty. "Where did you get this young man?" they wanted to know of Mr. Crose. "Why, he got converted." "Yes, yes, but where did you find him? He has taught us the great ideal of the nonsectarian church." Mr. Chemayel spent one year in Anderson College and Theological Seminary where he graduated with honor, though when he entered the College the September before he could speak English only a little. Seeing his outstanding ability, the French government presented him with a scholarship. This was the first time in its history that the French government ever gave a scholarship to a Protestant.

Mr. Chemayel is now again in his native land, working by choice among the village people. We are glad



BAPTISMAL SERVICE IN JORDAN RIVER

to note that his parents have been reconciled to him, and he is again making his home with them. Shall we not pray often and much for him that God will enable him always, as he received the Lord Jesus, so to walk in Him.

The Quality of the Work

The work of the Church of God in Syria is still in its infancy. Compared to other missions, we are but a tiny handful. Yet we must be thankful to God for the character and flavor of our mission in this bridge of the continents. While other Christian movements have been forced by the opposition of the Moslem majority to give over more and more of their evangelistic endeavors in favor of badly needed efforts at education and social reform, our missionaries have redoubled their strivings to bring the gospel of a new inner life. Many have been disappointed that the Church of God has not been able to provide them with



CHURCH OF GOD YOUNG PEOPLE

hospitals and schools such as the other evangelical movements have brought, and this has been a stumbling block to numbers. Others, on the contrary, appreciate the definite evangelistic emphasis and are glad to know where they may go to find that inward peace of which bodily comfort is no assurance.

Our work in Syria is small, but it carries with it a spiritual and evangelical vitality which is considered remarkable by other missions, and its influence is being felt and recognized throughout the Near East.

In closing this sketch may we ask that unceasing prayer be offered for our missionaries and national workers and that God will keep the land from falling again under the absolute sway of the Moslem, which would mean that all evangelical Christianity would be driven from the country.

